

By Thomas Ryan Stone

## **Detroit Tigers All-Time Team**

The Detroit Tigers were one of the charter clubs of the new American League when it was formed in 1901. That was an exciting time in Detroit, as the new “horseless carriage” was all the rage, and would soon propel the city into becoming a manufacturing leader in the United States. Unfortunately, the Tigers didn’t find success immediately, failing to place better than 3<sup>rd</sup> in their first six seasons. Ty Cobb’s first full season in 1907 helped to change things, and they won the AL pennant for three consecutive seasons (though failing in the World Series each time).

From 1910 to 1933 they had more winning seasons than losing ones, but never took first place in their league until 1934 when freshly imported catcher and manager Mickey Cochrane led the G-Men (Greenberg, Gehringer, and Goose Goslin) to a 101-53 record. They lost the World Series to the Cardinals, but managed to take their first championship the following season by defeating the Cubs four games to two. Greenberg and Gehringer again led the club to a pennant in 1940, and in 1954 a less impressive hitting lineup rode the dominance of pitching ace Hal Newhouser to take their second World Series title.

After a couple decades of very mixed results, the Tigers again achieved the sport’s ultimate peak by winning the World Series in 1984, again behind an outstanding ace in Denny McLain (who that year pitched baseball’s last 30-win season).

The next positive era for the Tigers began in 1998 when Sparky Anderson became manager. The team steadily built up a good core of players, and this led to an outstanding 104-58 championship-winning club in 2006. They again won their division in 2004, but then entered a stretch of 15 of 18 losing seasons (including an amazingly poor 43-119 season in 2003). They had success in 2006 when they took the AL Wild-Card and ended up going to the World Series, only to lose to the Cardinals in five games.

As you will see, the All-Time Tigers team is full of great hitters, with 3B being the only position of relative weakness. Their pitching staff, relative to other All-Time teams is not particularly strong, but even there they have had their share of strong individual seasons to be sure.

## 1st Base

**Hank Greenberg** (1930, 1933-41, 1945-1947) played almost his entire career in Detroit, playing only his final, over-the-hill season for Pittsburgh. While a Tiger he put up some simply monster seasons, starting with leading the league in doubles in 1934 with an amazing 63. He then led the league in HR (36) and RBI (170) the next year. He topped the AL in RBI three other times: an incredible 183 in 1937, and then 150 in 1940, and 127 in 1946. He also led the league in HR three additional times, with 58 in 1938, 41 in 1940, and 44 in 1946. He scored 100+ runs six times, and ended his 9+ Tiger seasons with a .319 average, 306 HR, 1202 RBI, .412 OBP, and .616 SLG. He took home two MVP awards, in 1935 and 1940. He lost more than three full seasons to the war, so just imagine what his numbers could have been!

**Norm Cash** (1960-74) also had a long tenure as a first-sacker for Detroit, and his peak season could arguably be said to be on par with some of Greenberg's best. The difference is that Cash's career year would turn out to be a fluke – a statistical height he'd never reach again. At the age of 26 in 1961, in his first full season in the majors, Cash led the league with 193 hits, a .361 batting average, and a fantastic .487 OBP. Even though he played for the Tigers a bit longer than Greenberg, he clearly must be considered the backup on this roster. In fact, he never led the AL in any major offensive category again, though he was a consistent slugger, hitting 20 or more HR in eleven seasons overall. Other than his first two partial seasons, he played his entire career in Detroit, smacking 373 HR and playing a solid first base defensively too.

Although these two were fairly obvious selections, I did at least consider a few other candidates. Rudy York (1934, 1937-45) started his career primarily as a catcher, but switched to 1B for Detroit in 1940 when Greenberg shifted to the outfield, and then during the war years that followed. Another great slugger, York was a seven-time all-star who hit 30+ HR four times and had 100+ RBI five times in Detroit. He burst onto the scene in 1937 smacking 35 HR and 103 RBI in only 375 at-bats. In 1943 he paced the AL with 34 HR and 118 RBI, placing third in MVP balloting. Not a particularly good fielder, he came in first or second in errors at 1B every year from 1941-45.

More recently, Cecil Fielder (1990-1996) found fame in Detroit after a one-season stint in Japan. He came back to the US and promptly became the first hitter to smash 50+ HR in a season in over a decade when he led the AL with 51 in 1990. He again led with 44 the following year, and managed to lead in RBI both seasons and the next as well. He

was the archetype of an all-or-nothing swinger, as during his seven seasons he put up 245 dingers, but also struck out 926 times. Tony Clark (1995-2001) basically took over for Fielder in both regards, hitting between 27-34 HR in four consecutive seasons, but also striking out over 125 times in each.

And finally, old-timer Lu Blue (1921-27) also deserves a brief mention, as he was a .295 hitter during his time in Detroit, getting walked enough to post a .403 OBP during those years.

## 2nd Base

Hall-of-Famer and lifetime Detroit Tiger **Charlie Gehringer** (1924-42) will be the starter at 2B for this all-time team. One of the greatest at the position, he hit .320 with a .404 OBP, 2839 Hits, 184 HR, 181 SB, 1427 RBI, and 1774 Runs. It's hard to determine his best overall season, but one candidate would be 1929 when he hit .339 and led the AL in five categories: 131 runs, 215 hits, 45 doubles, 19 triples, and 27 SB. In 1934 he hit .356 and led the league with 134 runs and 214 hits. Then in 1936 he hit .354 and led the league with 60 doubles. And finally in 1937 he took home his only batting crown by hitting a career-best .371 (also winning the AL MVP that year). The "Mechanical Man" was a great defender too, leading AL second basemen in fielding percentage six times, and ranking second another four times.

Another long-time, lifetime Tiger would have been a great choice as the starter for this roster if Gehringer weren't in his way. **Lou Whitaker** (1977-1995) was one-half of the double-play tandem that delighted Tigers fans for years. He had some pop in his bat, hitting 20+ HR four times, although never managing more than 85 RBI. He scored 90+ runs six times, and ended up his career with 1386 Runs, 244 HR, 1084 RBI, and a .276 average. Although his numbers weren't particularly impressive (.285, 3 HR) he was voted the top rookie in the AL in 1978, and went on to be an all-star five times and winner of three Gold Gloves.

Dick McAuliffe (1960-73) was almost a lifetime Tiger, finishing his solid career in Boston. He too had some power for a middle-infielder, hitting 20+ HR three times, and managed to lead the AL in runs scored with 95 in their championship 1968 season. Not a high-average hitter (.249), he was an all-star three times. He played more often at 2B, but also saw significant action at SS.

Two more recent Detroit 2B deserve only the briefest of mentions. Damion Easley (1996-2002) hit 20+ HR in three consecutive seasons and even had 100 RBI in his one all-star season (1998). And

Placido Polanco (2005-2009) batted .311 for the Tigers and had a career-year in 2007, hitting .341 with 200 hits and 105 runs.

### 3rd Base

Now we come to what is definitely the weakest position on the entire Tigers All-Time team roster. The choice for the starter is a close call, but I'll go with high-average hitter **George Kell** (1946-52). He is a Hall-of-Famer, though not a particularly strong member. Playing for five franchises, Kell played about half his career – including several of his best seasons – for the Tigers. In 1949 he led the AL with a .343 average, and then paced the league the following two seasons in both hits and doubles, including 56 two-baggers in 1950. That year was probably his best overall, as he hit .340, scored 114 runs, and managed 101 RBI even while hitting only 8 HR. He ended up his time in Detroit with a stellar .325 batting average, and so I'll give him the nod as starter on this team.

One could make a case for **Travis Fryman** (1990-97) as the starter over Kell, so it seems obvious to me he at least deserves the backup spot. Leaving aside his partial rookie campaign, Fryman hit 15-22 HR in his seven other seasons as a Tiger. A four-time All-Star for Detroit, he played some SS in addition to his fine glove work at 3B.

Light-hitting, good-fielding Aurelio Rodriguez (1971-79) has actually played more games at 3B than anyone else in Tigers history. Although he had a little pop in his bat, his .239 average and anemic .274 OBP never impressed anyone. He won the Gold Glove award in 1976 and was regularly amongst the leaders in fielding percentage for his position.

A handful of others deserve brief mention, starting with Ray Boone (1953-58) who played parts of six seasons for Detroit and hit 20+ HR in four of them. He led the league in RBI with 116 in 1955, and was an all-star twice. Don Wert (1963-70) played most of his career for the Tigers, and like Rodriguez had some pop but a low average (.242). Pinky Higgins (1939-44) was a solid contributor during the war years, providing 70+ RBI every season he played in Detroit.

And most recently Brandon Inge (2001-10) has shown valuable versatility playing mostly at 3B but also significant time at catcher and even some outfield too. He hit 27 HR in both 2006 and 2009, though his .237 average and .307 OBP weren't as helpful to the club.

## Shortstop

The other half of the long-time double-play tandem doesn't have a Hall-of-Fame competitor for this roster, so **Alan Trammell** (1977-96) is the clear starter here. Like Whitaker, he played his entire career for the Tigers. A six-time All-Star, and four-time Gold Glove winner, Trammell showed little power until the mid-1980s. But by 1987 he was clearly an outstanding hitter, as he batted .343 with 28 HR and 105 RBI en route to a second-place finish in the MVP voting. He also had some speed, swiping 236 bases with a high of 30 in 1983. A lifetime .285 hitter, he ended up with 1231 runs and 1003 RBI. I'm not one of his supporters for the Hall-of-Fame, but I think he clearly merits top honors amongst Detroit shortstops.

**Harvey Kuenn** (1952-59) played more than the first half of his career in Detroit. He took Rookie of the Year honors in 1953 when he hit .308 with 209 hits. Although he didn't display much speed or power, he led the AL in hits four times, doubles three times, and led the league with a .353 average in 1959. His .314 average for the Tigers earned him an All-Star team selection in all seven of his full seasons in Detroit, the last two of which he was used as a CF and RF, respectively.

Also deserving consideration were Donie Bush (1908-21) and Billy Rogell (1930-39). Bush played most of his career with the Tigers, showing solid speed by swiping 30 or more bases in eight seasons. He scored 100+ runs four times, and had 90+ another four times. He did this in part because of his ability to draw walks, a category in which he led the league five times, which aided his rather low .250 batting average. A good fielder, Rogell also played most of his career in Detroit. He had perhaps his best year in 1934 when he hit .296, scored 114 runs, and managed 100 RBI while only hitting 3 HR.

And finally, in more recent years Carlos Guillen (2004-10) has put up some good numbers while playing a variety of positions (but primarily SS). He so far has been a .299 hitter and has shown some power too, while making the all-star time three times.

## Catcher

The top two catchers for the All-Time Tigers are pretty obvious, but what is less clear is who should be selected as the starter. In the end, I'm going to go with **Bill Freehan** (1961, 63-76), the Detroit native who also played his entire career for the Tigers. He generally provided 15-20 HR power (solid given the pitching-dominant era he played in), but arguably was even more valuable as a defender. He won five Gold Glove

awards, and was an All-Star 11 times. A key part of their 1968 World Championship club, Freehan hit 25 HR with 84 RBI that season, which was good enough for second in the MVP voting (battery-mate McLain took home the honors).

This means the backup will be **Lance Parrish** (1977-86), another outstanding defensive catcher with power. He hit 30+ HRs twice for the Tigers, and 20+ four other times. In their championship 1984 season, he smashed 33 HRs with 98 RBI (though he only hit .237). He took home three Gold Glove awards, and was an all-star six times as a Tiger.

There were various other Tiger catchers I checked out, but none came close to earning a spot on this roster. Mickey Cochrane (1934-37) played for the Tigers for two full and two partial seasons as a player/manager (and one more as manager only) at the end of his Hall-of-Fame career. With the Tigers, his power was largely gone, but he could still hit (.313). When he joined the club in 1934 he promptly led them to a 101-53 season and the AL pennant, earning him the league's MVP award (barely besting teammate Gehring in the vote). The next year he did even better, by guiding the Tigers to the championship.

Ivan Rodriguez (2004-2008) brought his outstanding defense to Detroit and was an all-star four times and won three Gold Gloves as a Tiger. He hit .334 with 19 HR and 86 RBI in his first season in Detroit, but then didn't produce nearly as well after that. Mickey Tettleton (1991-94) had three consecutive 30+ HR seasons for the Tigers as a C/DH / OF / 1B. And finally, Johnny Bassler (1921-27) was a pretty good hitter back in the day: he managed a .308 average and .420 OBP in his seven years in Detroit.

## Outfield

Regardless of what you think of Ty Cobb the man, **Ty Cobb** (1905-26) the ballplayer is clearly the top outfielder in Tigers history (and one of the best from any team). Cobb played all but his final two seasons for Detroit, and over that time he accumulated 3900 hits, 665 doubles, 284 triples, 111 HR, 2088 runs, 1805 RBI, 869 SB, and hit .368 with a .433 OBP. In terms of leading his peers, try these on for size: he led the AL in runs five times, hits eight times, doubles three times, triples four times, RBI four times, SB six times, and even HR once with 9 in 1909. Oh, and the Georgia Peach won 11 batting titles for the Tigers, with his best averages including .420, .409, .390, .384, .383 (twice), and .382. Statistically, his single best year was probably 1911 when he hit .420, and led the league with all of the following: 248 hits, 147 runs, 47 doubles, 24 triples, 127 RBI, and 83 SB. He didn't produce nearly as well in the three

World Series Detroit played in (and lost) from 1907-1909, as he hit a mere .262 with only five extra-base hits in 65 at-bats. But aside from that, Cobb's production was simply awesome.

Next up in the outfield is lifetime-Tiger **Al Kaline** (1953-74), who signed out of high school and never spent a day in the minors. After a mediocre rookie campaign in 1954, Kaline took home the AL batting title with a .340 average in 1955 while also leading in hits with 200, and also providing 27 HR, 102 RBI, and 121 runs scored. The following year he again hit 27 HR, drove in 128 runs, and batted .314. He never really reached those lofty numbers again, but had a long and consistently-good career. Often overshadowed by the top superstars of his era, Kaline is what might be called a good "gray ink" offensive star, meaning he regularly was amongst the league leaders in major offensive categories, but aside from that early batting title, never really led the league in anything. He ended his career with a .297 average, 3007 hits, 399 HR, 1583 RBI, and 1622 Runs. And with 10 Gold Glove awards he was a top-notch defender too, all leading to an impressive 15 seasons as an All-Star.

The third OF spot is a tough decision in my opinion. There are two early Detroit Tiger hitters to consider carefully, and in the end I give the nod to **Sam Crawford** (1903-17), but just barely. Wahoo Sam emerged as a star player first for Cincinnati, and joined Detroit in his fifth season. He went on to lead the AL in Triples five times, en route to being the All-Time MLB leader in that category. He also had 100+ RBI five times for the Tigers, leading the league three times. He had solid speed too, stealing 318 bases to go with his 2466 hits, 1115 runs, 1264 RBI, and .309 average.

The fourth OF spot, with my apologies, will therefore go to **Harry Heilmann** (1914, 16-29). An outstanding hitter, Heilmann led the AL in batting four times with such lofty results as .403, .398, .394, and .393. Those four seasons were the four that he had 200+ hits, with an impressive 237 in 1921. He had pretty good power for his era – nothing like Babe Ruth, but double-digit HR in the 1920s was usually good enough to be in the top ten in the league. He scored 100+ runs four times, and drove in 100+ in eight seasons. He wasn't the runner that Crawford was, nor based on the numbers as good a fielder (he also played over 20% of his games at 1B). If you prefer Heilmann's batting titles over Crawford's speed, triples and RBI titles, then I wouldn't argue with you much: they would be pretty interchangeable in an All-Time Tigers lineup. Heck, on a Field of Dreams they'd make a fine platoon, since Heilmann hit right while Crawford hit left!

For the fifth spot, I'll select an often forgotten, overshadowed star, **Bobby Veach** (1912-23). Veach batted .310 and like many players of

his era had mostly triples-power, hitting 10+ triples in ten consecutive seasons. He led the league in triples with 17 in 1919, and led the league in doubles twice and RBIs three times. And he was outstanding defensively as well.

The sixth spot on this roster is another close call. I'm going with fan favorite, Detroit native **Willie Horton** (1963-77). This is based in part on his longevity with the club, but that not's to say he didn't put up some strong numbers: .276, 262 HR, 886 RBI. He had triple-digit RBI in each of his first two full seasons. A four-time all-star, he hit 20+ in six seasons for the Tigers. I choose him over Kirk Gibson (1979-87, 93-95), who provided a good combination of power (five 20+ HR seasons) and speed (four 20+ SB seasons) for the Tigers. In fact, his career numbers for Detroit ended up very balanced in this regard: 195 HR and 194 SB. Something few people know about Kirk Gibson: he was never an all-star, even during his 1988 MVP season for the Dodgers. That might be in part because he was often injured: for the Tigers, he only twice played 130+ games in a season.

Aside from Gibson, I did consider a host of other Detroit outfielders. Bobby Higginson (1995-05) played his entire career for the Tigers and showed some good pop hitting 20+ four times as well as the ability to steal a few bases. His best season statistically likely was 2000 when he hit .300, 44 doubles, 30 HR, 104 Runs, 102 RBI, and 15 SB. Like Higginson, Jim Northrup (1964-74) was never an all-star, but was steady for about a decade. He hit 20+ HR in three seasons, including 21 HR and 90 RBI as part of the 1968 champs. Chet Lemon (1982-90) was traded from the White Sox after the strike-shortened 1981 season, and like Northrup hit 20+ three times. Although he never won a Gold Glove, he covered a lot ground in center field for the Tigers.

Pete Fox (1933-40) played most of his career for the Tigers, showing little power and moderate speed. He hit .302 and scored 100+ Runs three times. His best season was no doubt 1937 when he hit .331 with 208 Hits, 39 doubles, 116 Runs, 12 HR, and 12 SB. Gee Walker (1931-37) was Fox's teammate, and played the first half of his career for the Tigers. He had little power, but solid speed with 20+ SB four times. He was a good hitter, batting .317 for Detroit including a .353 average with 55 doubles in 1936. He was an All-Star the following season and it was his overall best: .335, 213 Hits, 18 HR, 105 Runs, 113 RBI, and 23 SB.

Mickey Stanley (1964-78) was a lifetime Tiger but only played in 100+ games in seven seasons. He had little power or speed, and batted only .248, but was a good centerfielder taking home four Gold Glove awards. Another centerfielder, Ron LeFlore (1974-79) hit .297 and ran

around the bases for the Tigers for six seasons. He managed 294 stolen bases, including 68 to lead the AL in 1978 and then 78 the next year (and a whopping 97 the year after that for Montreal). He also scored 100+ runs three times, including a league-leading 126 in 1978. More recently, another solid centerfielder, Curtis Granderson (2004-09) played for the Tigers for four full seasons. While he struck out often, he provided a solid combination of power and speed, and had an outstanding 2007 season of .302, 23 HR, 26 SB, 122 Runs, and an amazing 23 triples.

Steve Kemp (1977-81) had a promising start to his career with the Tigers, including an all-star 1979 season of .318, 26 HR, 105 RBI in only 134 games played. He was the player swapped for Chet Lemon, seemingly a good move by the Tigers because other than his strong 1982 season, Kemp's career quickly declined. Joining the Tigers in the same season as Lemon, Larry Herndon (1982-88) hit 20+ HR twice, and enjoyed a fine 1982 season: .292, 23 HR, 13 Triples, 92 Runs, 88 RBI, and 12 SB.

The insanely versatile Tony Phillips (1990-94) started his career with the A's, but signed with Detroit as a free-agent after the 1989 season. He displayed double-digit HR power and double-digit SB speed, all while spreading his playing time around LF, 3B, 2B, RF, SS, DH, and CF.

Who was the third outfielder alongside Cobb and Crawford in the early years of the Detroit Tigers? Matty McIntyre (1904-10) wasn't their equal, and had literally near-zero power (3 HR in 6+ seasons). But he stole 29 bases in 1906, and led the league in runs with 105 in 1908.

Hoot Evers (1941, 46-52, 54) was a productive Tiger outfielder, who after four at-bats at age 20 in 1941, re-joined the Tigers after the end of World War II. He had 100+ RBI in his two All-Star seasons, including his impressive 1950 campaign: .323, 21 HR, 100 Runs, 103 RBI, and a league-leading 11 triples. He was born Walter Arthur Evans, but gained the nickname "Hoot" as a child because of his liking of the cowboy films of Richard "Hoot" Gibson.

Also worthy of brief mention are several pretty big-name Tiger outfielders who had short tenures with the club. Heinie Manush (1923-27) started his Hall-of-Fame career for Detroit, and won the AL batting title in 1926 with a .378 mark. On the flip-side, Hall-of-Famer Goose Goslin (1934-37) played for the Tigers late in his career, including three 100+ RBI seasons, two of which were key contributions to AL pennant winning seasons. Vic Wertz (1947-52, 61-63) started his career for Detroit, representing them as an All-Star three times, and providing 133 RBI in 1949 and 123 RBI the following season. Rocky Colavito (1960-63) had four solid seasons for the Tigers in the middle of his career. He was an all-

star in two of those years, and he had HR totals of 35, 45, 37, and 22. His 1961 season was overshadowed by the Yankees M&M boys, but it was impressive nonetheless: .290, 45 HR, 129 Runs, and 140 RBI.

Finally, Magglio Ordonez (2005-10) signed as free agent after many outstanding seasons for the White Sox. His has hit for a high average (.318 over six seasons), and was the MVP runner-up in 2007 when he led the AL with a .363 average and 54 doubles, and also provided 216 Hits, 28 HR, 139 RBI, and 117 Runs. If he has a few more solid seasons, could one argue for him over Horton as the sixth OF on this All-Time roster?

## Starting Pitching

The Detroit Tigers history is stronger in offense than in pitching, though they have had numerous lifetime or nearly-lifetime hurlers. That said, the ace of this All-Time team, Hall-of-Famer **Hal Newhouser** (1939-53) had a three-year span for the ages: 29-9 and 2.22 ERA in 1944, 25-9 and 1.81 ERA in 1945, and 26-9 and 1.94 ERA in 1946. He led the AL in wins in all three seasons, strikeouts in the first two, and ERA in latter two. Even as a pitcher, he was the AL MVP in the first two seasons, and runner up in the third. He slipped to 17-17 in 1947, but rebounded to 21-12 and 18-11 after that. Due to several early losing seasons, his career Detroit mark is “only” 200-148 with a 3.07 ERA, but that is still enough to head this staff.

Another long-time Tiger, sinkerballer **Mickey Lolich** (1963-75) comes next. He was the hero of the 1968 World Series, pitching and winning three complete games, including topping Bob Gibson in game seven on only two days rest. He later posted consecutive seasons in 1971-72 of 25-14 with a 2.92 ERA and 22-14 with a 2.50 ERA. In that 1971 campaign he led the league in victories, strikeouts (308), and complete games (29). On the flip side, the durable Lolich also led the AL in losses twice, with a 14-19 record in 1970 and a 16-21 record in 1974. He finished his Tigers tenure with a 207-175 record and 2679 strikeouts.

Yet another longtime workhorse Tiger, **Jack Morris** (1977-90), will be the third pitcher on this staff. He won 20+ games twice for the Tigers, led the league in strikeouts with 232 in 1983, and was the 19-11 ace for the 1984 champs.

Old-timer **George Mullin** (1902-13) pitched most of his career for Detroit, posting five 20+ win seasons and a 2.76 ERA. His best year was in 1909, when he went 29-8 with a 2.22 mark. A little on the wild side

early on, he led the league in walks in four consecutive seasons. But he was outstanding with a 1.86 ERA in seven games in the franchises' first three World Series appearances.

Newhouser teammate **Dizzy Trout** (1939-52) also played almost his entire career for the Tigers. He led the league with 20 wins in 1943, and then was the other part of the dynamic duo in 1944 when he went 27-14 and led the AL with a 2.12 ERA and 33 complete games. Overall he posted a 161-153 record and a 3.20 ERA for Detroit.

The ace of the strong mid-thirties Tiger clubs, **Tommy Bridges** (1930-43, 45-46) won 20+ games from 1934-36. That included pacing the AL with 23 wins against 11 losses in 1936. Playing his entire career in Detroit, Bridges' strong curveball made him an All-Star six times.

**Hooks Dauss** (1912-26) was another lifetime Tiger, and won 20+ games in three seasons. His best was in 1915 when he tallied a 24-13 record with a 2.50 ERA. George Dauss got the nickname "Hooks" from his effective curveballs, and he ended his career with 223 wins and 182 losses – both all-time highs for the franchise.

At this point, as you will later see, there is an interesting question: do I choose an 8<sup>th</sup> starting pitcher, or go with three relievers? One could argue either way, but it is hard to keep **Denny McLain** (1963-70) off this roster. After several fairly productive seasons, McLain led the Tigers to the championship in 1968 and made history by being the last 30-game winner in the majors. That year he went 31-6 with a 1.96 ERA, and followed it up with a 24-9, 2.80 season (winning the Cy Young award both years, and the AL MVP in the first). His 117-62 Tiger career is a .654 winning percentage, and so I'm including him here as the 8<sup>th</sup> starter.

So who does that leave off the squad? Probably at the top of the list would be Wild Bill Donovan (1903-12, 18), who posted a career 140-96 record with a 2.49 ERA for the early Tigers. He had several fine seasons, and one truly outstanding one in 1907: 25-4, 2.19 ERA. Teammate Ed Killian (1904-10) also provided some success, with a 23-14 record and 2.27 ERA in 1905, only to do even better two years later at 25-13 and 1.78.

While I consider Jim Bunning's election to the Hall of Fame by the Veterans Committee to be questionable at best, I did take a look at him for this all-time squad. He spent the first half of his career in Detroit, and that included five all-star seasons, including going 20-8 with a 2.69 ERA in 1957.

After a partial rookie season, Tommy Bridges' teammate Schoolboy Rowe (1933-42) posted a 24-8 record, and then followed that

up with seasons of 19-13 and 19-10. Together they were an outstanding 1-2 punch for those great Tiger clubs of the 30s.

Like so many others, Fred Hutchinson (1939-40, 46-53) lost significant time to the war, pitching a bit as a 19 and 20 year old but not becoming a regular until age 26 in 1946. A lifetime Tiger, he never won more than 18 games in a season, but also never had a losing season as a full-time hurler. He spent his last two playing years as a player-manager.

Frank Lary (1954-64) joined the rotation soon after Hutchinson left it, and went 21-13 in his second full season. In 1961 he posted a 23-9 record, coming in third in the Cy Young vote. And yet another hurler from this era deserves mention, Virgil Trucks (1941-43, 45-52, 56). He only had more than 16 wins in a season once, in his all-star season of 1949 when he went 19-11 with a 2.81 ERA.

Earl Whitehill (1923-32) went 133-119 for the Tigers, but had a 4.16 ERA and never won more than 17 games in a season. Jack Morris's rotation mate Dan Petry (1979-87, 91) was solid for several seasons, including going 19-11 in 1983 and 18-8 for the championship 1984 club.

Finally, in his first five full seasons, Justin Verlander has had four good years (17-9, 18-6, 19-9, 18-9), and one bad season (11-17). He took home the Rookie of the Year award in 2006, and then led the AL in wins (19) and strikeouts (269) in 2009. Not enough to make this roster yet, but at age 27 he's already building a nice resume.

## Relief Pitching

Because I went with McLain as an 8<sup>th</sup> starter, that means I have room for only two relievers on this roster. The first will be Canadian **John Hiller** (1965-70, 72-80), who played his entire career for the Tigers. Playing in the era before the bullpen positions became as specialized as it is today, Hiller didn't rack up as many saves as modern closers do. After several fairly effective years as a mixed starter and reliever, he suffered a serious stroke and heart attack at the age of only 27. He missed the entire 1971 season and only pitched 44 innings in 1972. But then he had his career year in 1973 when he set a new record with 38 saves, to go with a 10-5 mark and 1.44 ERA. After that he had four seasons with 13-15 saves and ERAs well below 3.00. But he averaged more than two innings per outing so he often had a lot of decisions too. An interesting example is 1974, when he had only 13 saves, but pitched 150 innings spread over 59 games, and posted a 17-14 record without ever starting a game. We just don't see pitching lines like that anymore.

For the second relief spot on this roster, I considered several candidates. As with McLain as the 8<sup>th</sup> starter, I'm going to go with outstanding peak performance over longevity, and therefore select **Willie Hernandez** (1984-89). After a mediocre career in the National League, Hernandez was traded by the Phillies to the Tigers before the 1984 season. He was lights out for the Tigers that year, pitching 140 innings, saving 32 games, and posting a 9-3 record with a 1.92 ERA. He was a key part of their championship team, and so was not only awarded the AL Cy Young but the MVP title too. He continued to save games in the years that followed, ending up with 120 over six seasons in Detroit, but was never nearly as good as that one magical season.

Mike Henneman (1987-95) was the next Detroit closer after Hernandez, and he was steady if not spectacular. He could be counted on for 20-25 saves each year, and ended up with 154 for the Tigers overall, to go with a respectable 3.05 ERA. If you prefer him to Hernandez, I wouldn't argue too much.

Todd Jones (1997-2001, 06-08) was the next regular closer after Henneman, and actually had two stints in their bullpen. He has the most career saves for the Tigers with 235, and had 30+ saves in five seasons, including a league leading 42 in 2000. But his work out of the pen was often headache-inducing, as he'd get into jams and only sometimes get out of them, as his relatively high ERA for a closer indicates (4.07).

### **Extra Spot**

There are lots of candidates for the honorary "extra spot," but I'll go with Rudy York over Kirk Gibson, Dick McAuliffe, Donie Bush, Bill Donovan, Mike Henneman, and Todd Jones.

### **Team Captain**

Based on the numbers, this has to go to Cobb. Honorable mention to Kaline, Greenberg, Gehringer, and Newhouser.

### **Starting Lineup**

A mythical starting lineup for this squad might look like this:

Ty Cobb OF

Sam Crawford OF

Al Kaline OF

Hank Greenberg 1B  
Charlie Gehringer 2B  
Alan Trammell SS  
George Kell 3B  
Bill Freehan C  
Hal Newhouser SP

If you prefer Heilmann over Crawford, you can just swap him out and still bat him second. Cobb played predominantly CF, but Crawford, Heilmann, and Kaline all mostly played RF, so that means we lack a true LF here. Bobby Veach, the fifth OF to make this roster, was the top regular LF, so inserting him into the lineup and shifting Crawford to DH, the lineup might be (with plenty of freedom to move guys around, except perhaps always keeping Cobb at leadoff and Greenberg at cleanup):

Ty Cobb CF  
Sam Crawford DH  
Al Kaline RF  
Hank Greenberg 1B  
Charlie Gehringer 2B  
Bobby Veach LF  
Alan Trammell SS  
George Kell 3B  
Bill Freehan C

### **Prospects for Current Players**

Should he stay with the Tigers for several more years, Justin Verlander could crack this All-Time team. Magglio Ordonez has batted .318 in six seasons for the Tigers, but at age 36 will likely slow down soon. Miguel Cabrera is an incredibly good hitter, and has had three strong seasons since coming over from the Marlins. Still only 27, he should have a great career ahead of him – but it will take many consistent seasons with Detroit to surpass Cash to make this dream team. Carlos Guillen had several good seasons as a SS for Detroit, and since then has played a variety of positions, but his offensive production has declined of late. And the also versatile Brandon Inge has been with the Tigers for ten seasons,

and only needs to surpass Fryman's resume to land a spot on this squad. We'll see...

## **Tigers Retired Numbers**

Charlie Gehringer (2), Hank Greenberg (5), Al Kaline (6), Hal Newhouser (16), Willie Horton (23), Ty Cobb (recognized, but no number).

## **Selections From Other Authors and Fan Surveys**

- 1957: Sport magazine, December issue

As part of a running series, Sport magazine reported on all-time all-star teams picked by "big league publicity departments and the writers covering the clubs." Here is what they had to say:

First Base: Hank Greenberg, the all-time home-run great who played in Detroit from 1933 to 1946.

Second Base: Charley Gehringer, a teammate of Hank's on three Tiger pennant winners. Charley spent his entire big-league career in Detroit (1924-42), batted .320, is now in the Hall of Fame.

Shortstop: Donie Bush, a Tiger regular from 1909 until 1921.

Third Base: George Moriarty, who played there from 1909 through 1915 and managed the Tigers in 1927-28.

Outfield: We can wrap these three immortals into one bundle, for they all have one thing in common—they are in baseball's Hall of Fame. Ty Cobb, Sam Crawford, Harry Heilmann are their names.

Catcher: Mickey Cochrane, another Hall of Famer, who played with the Tigers from 1934 through 1937 and managed them from 1934 to 1938.

Lefthanded Pitcher: Hal Newhouser, who pitched for the Tigers from 1939 through 1953, winning exactly 200 games for them.

Righthanded Pitcher: Wild Bill Donovan, who pitched for Detroit from 1903 through 1912 and again in 1918.

Back in 1957 some of these selections were completely obvious: Greenberg, Gehringer, the outfielders, Newhouser, and even Bush. The selection of Moriarty again underscores the weakness of 3B for the Tigers. And the choice of Donovan as top RHP is certainly debatable.

- 1969 The Sporting News Fan Poll

The July 5, 1969 issue reports the results of a fan poll for the long-standing franchises of the day. The results for the Tigers were:

1B: Hank Greenberg

2B: Charley Gehringer

3B: George Kell

SS: Billy Rogell

C: Mickey Cochrane

LF: Harry Heilmann

CF: Ty Cobb

RF: Al Kaline

RHP: Denny McLain

LHP: Hal Newhouser

Greatest Player: Ty Cobb

Mostly good choices, though I think Rogell was a mistaken selection at SS. Heilmann was really a RF not a LF, so it is misleading to choose him there. And going with McLain is somewhat understandable, since he was just coming off his career year and in the midst of another fine season, so fans likely assumed he'd have a fine career ahead of him.

- 1990: The Baseball Research Journal

In an interesting article, Robert C. Berlo used Thorn and Palmer's TPR (Total Player Rating) system to choose all-time teams. He selected players based on their best 800 consecutive games for the franchise, with a minimum of five years played. His results:

1B Hank Greenberg 19.6

2B Charlie Gehringer 25.0

SS Alan Trammell 14.3

3B George Kell 9.5

RF Al Kaline 18.8

CF Ty Cobb 33.6

LF Harry Heilmann 17.9

C Bill Freehan 19.7

SP Hal Newhouser 28.1

SP Dizzy Trout 22.0

SP Tommy Bridges 17.9

SP Fred Hutchinson 13.3

RP John Hiller 11.3

Total player rating attempts to provide a single number representing the overall value of the player (including fielding). It is the application of this approach to only the player's best 800 consecutive games for the Tigers that leads to these results. Players who played a long time for the team, racking up quality career numbers but not having as many standout seasons in a row will see their rating relatively lower.

No major surprises here, except seeing Hutchinson rate as the fourth best starting pitcher, and again seeing Heilmann listed misleadingly as a LF.

- 1992 *The All-Time All-Star Baseball Book*, Nick Acocella, and Donald Dewey

In their brief writeup on the Tigers, they select a pretty reasonable lineup of Greenberg, Gehringer, Kell, Trammell, Cobb, Heilmann, Kaline, Cochrane, and Newhouser. The only one I disagree with here really is Cochrane over Freehan as the catcher. They don't even mention Freehan as getting honorable mention, including Parrish instead, along with Sam Crawford, George Mullin, Tommy Bridges, Harvey Kuenn, and Jack Morris.

- 1995 *Baseball Ratings* by Charles S. Faber

The Faber system as applied in 1995 creates the exact same starting eight batters as I've selected. The five pitchers are Newhouser, Lolich, Mullin, Bridges, and Daus, although Henneman is rated the top reliever.

- 2000 *They Earned Their Stripes: The Detroit Tigers All-Time Team*

This book provides both write-ups about various Tigers all-time greats, and also reports the results of a 25,000 fan survey conducted in 1999 and originally written up in the *Detroit News* on September 27, 1999.

The first-team selections the fans voted for were Greenberg, Gehringer, Kell, Trammell, Cobb, Kaline, Gibson, Freehan, Hiller as the reliever, with Morris as the RHP and a tie between Newhouser and Lolich for the LHP. To me, that elevates Gibson too much and to a lesser extent Lolich as well. The article noted that aside from the tie, the closest votes were “At second base, Gehringer received 51 percent of the votes and Lou Whitaker received 40 percent. For the third outfielder Gibson received 34 percent and Harry Heilmann, a Hall of Fame outfielder who played from 1914-1929, received 23 percent.”

For the runner-up team the results were Cash at 1B, Whitaker at 2B, Kuenn at SS, no 3B listed, Parrish at C, Heilmann, Stanley, and Horton for the OF, no LHP listed because of the tie, McLain as the RHP, and Hernandez as the reliever. I think McLain is not deserving, but fans of course would remember his few outstanding seasons. Clearly the fans forgot about Crawford and Veach, elevating both Stanley and Horton in their place. And it is interesting that no additional 3B was indicated, again showing the historical weakness for Detroit at the hot corner.

- 2003 *Rob Neyer's Big Book of Baseball Lineups* by Rob Neyer

Neyer's choices don't differ much from mine. He has the same starting lineup, except he breaks out the outfielders by position and so lists Veach as the top LF (with Cobb as CF and Kaline as RF). His top four pitchers are Newhouser, Lolich, Bridges, and Morris.

Then on his second roster he has mostly the same picks as mine, with a few exceptions. He has Bush over Kuenn at SS and Henneman over Hernandez as reliever. His second outfield is Horton in LF, Lemon in CF, and Crawford in RF – and he notes the wealth of rightfielders means Heilmann is excluded. His remaining starting pitchers were Trout, Mullin, Daus, and Donovan.

- 2006 *The Team By Team Encyclopedia of Major League Baseball*, by Dennis Purdy

Purdy's massive book includes sections listing his choices of “significant” players for each franchise. He doesn't arrange these as all-time teams, with minimum players at each position. Nonetheless, I feel his choices worthy of including here. For the Tigers he included: Bridges, Bunning, Bush, Cash, Cobb, Crawford, Daus, Donovan, Fielder, Freehan, Gehringer, Greenberg, Heilmann, Henneman, Hernandez, Hiller, Horton, Kaline, Kell, Kuenn, Lolich, McAuliffe, McLain, Morris, Mullin, Newhouser, Parrish, Trammell, Trout, Veach, Whitaker, York.

In my view Mr. Purdy made outstanding selections. The only omission worth noting in my opinion is Travis Fryman, who can be argued to be one of the Tigers' top two players at their historically weakest position.

- 2010 Few and Chosen: Defining Tigers Greatness Across the Eras, by Lance Parrish with Phil Pepe

As with each book in this fun series, the authors choose a top five players at each position. For the Tigers, their lists in order are:

Catcher: Bill Freehan, Ivan Rodriguez, Mickey Cochrane, Mickey Tettleton, Matt Nokes

First Base: Hank Greenberg, Norm Cash, Rudy York, Cecil Fielder, Tony Clark

Second Base: Charlie Gehringer, Lou Whitaker, Placido Polanco, Dick McAuliffe, Eddie Mayo

Shortstop: Alan Trammell, Harvey Kuenn, Carlos Guillen, Billy Rogell, Ed Brinkman

Third Base: Travis Fryman, George Kell, Ray Boone, Pinky Higgins, Tom Brookens

Left Field: Bobby Veach, Willie Horton, Rocky Colavito, Goose Goslin, Heinie Manush

Center Field: Ty Cobb, Curtis Granderson, Chet Lemon, Ron LeFlore, Hoot Evers

Right Field: Al Kaline, Harry Heilmann, Sam Crawford, Kirk Gibson, Magglio Ordonez

Right-Handed Pitcher: Denny McLain, Jim Bunning, Jack Morris, Tommy Bridges, Hooks Dauss (tie), Schoolboy Rowe (tie)

Left-Handed Pitcher: Hal Newhouser, Mickey Lolich, Harry Coveleski, Frank Tanana, Hank Aguirre

Relief Pitcher: John Hiller, Willie Hernandez, Todd Jones, Mike Henneman, Aurelio Lopez

As is typical in this book series, Parrish omits himself from consideration, hence the Catcher list without his included. He chose Fryman over Kell at 3B, something I can't argue with very much. His

outfield selections are all pretty good, split out as they are by the three separate positions.

If you go by peak performance, then sure McLain is a good choice. But I don't think Bunning's Tiger career should outrank that of Morris or Bridges. And for the southpaws, after the obvious first two, Harry Coveleski is an interesting choice. He only pitched three full seasons for Detroit, but they were consistently good ones: 22-12 and 2.49 in 1914, 22-13 and 2.45 in 1915, and 21-11 and 1.97 in 1916. Frank Tanana pitched for the Tigers for eight years but never won more than 15 games. Hank Aguirre did lead the AL with a 2.21 ERA in 1962, but only won double-digit games in three seasons for the Tigers.

### Win Shares

Amongst other things, Bill James' innovative Win Shares system is helpful in comparing players across eras. Using my data sources, and listing players only at the position I considered and rated them at for this book, the win shares for players while playing for the Tigers are (100 or more):

First Base:

1. 309.5 Norm Cash
2. 251.1 Hank Greenberg
3. 177.7 Rudy York
4. 123.8 Cecil Fielder
5. 110.9 Lu Blue

Interesting that Cash's somewhat longer career, and presumably the relative eras in which they played, elevate him over Greenberg.

Second Base:

1. 381.2 Charlie Gehringer
2. 346.2 Lou Whitaker
3. 233.4 Dick McAuliffe

Again, interesting to see how close the results here are between the top two.

Third Base:

1. 138.6 Travis Fryman
2. 130.2 George Kell
3. 102.4 Brandon Inge
4. 101.0 Ray Boone

And yet again, such a close result at the top between Fryman and Kell, which validates my lack of clarity around who the starter should be on the all-time roster. Another few seasons and perhaps Inge will catch and surpass them both.

Shortstop:

1. 313.2 Allen Trammell
2. 230.7 Donie Bush
3. 150.8 Billy Rogell
4. 148.0 Harvey Kuenn
5. 104.0 Carlos Guillen

Kuenn's shorter tenure in Detroit apparently doesn't rate as well here as Bush's longer span.

Catcher:

1. 263.1 Bill Freehan
2. 164.5 Lance Parrish

Only the two obvious guys have surpassed 100 here.

Outfield:

1. 693.7 Ty Cobb
2. 438.0 Al Kaline
3. 380.0 Sam Crawford
4. 333.1 Harry Heilmann
5. 250.0 Bobby Veach
6. 199.2 Willie Horton
7. 157.9 Kirk Gibson

8. 153.6 Jim Northrup
9. 148.7 Bobby Higginson
10. 146.3 Chet Lemon
11. 126.2 Mickey Stanley
12. 116.3 Matty McIntyre
13. 108.7 Tony Phillips
14. 107.6 Ron LeFlore
15. 105.9 Vic Wertz
16. 104.5 Pete Fox

This ranks the top seven outfielders in the same order I did, but it is interesting to see Northrup, Higginson, and Lemon trail so closely behind Gibson in this list.

Starting Pitcher:

1. 253.0 Hal Newhouser
2. 230.6 George Mullin
3. 225.4 Tommy Bridges
4. 213.3 Mickey Lolich
5. 212.5 Dizzy Trout
6. 208.0 Hooks Dauss
7. 183.4 Jack Morris
8. 152.5 Bill Donovan
9. 132.3 Frank Lary
10. 131.2 Jim Bunning
11. 129.6 Earl Whitehill
12. 129.2 Virgil Trucks
13. 117.2 Fred Hutchinson
14. 117.0 Schoolboy Rowe
15. 111.6 Denny McLain
16. 111.4 Ed Killian
17. 102.1 Dan Petry

Morris rates a bit lower here than I expected, and not surprisingly the brevity of McLain's career keeps him from rising higher on this list.

Relief Pitcher:

1. 144.3 John Hiller

No other relievers from this franchise have over 100 Win Shares. Henneman ranks second with 89.8.

<b>Pos.</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Key Career Red Sox Statistics</b>
1B	Hank Greenberg	.319, 306 HR, 1202 RBI, .412 OBP
1B	Norm Cash	.272, 373 HR, 1028 R, 1087 RBI
2B	Charlie Gehringer	.320, 574 D, 1774 R, 1427 RBI, .404 OBP
2B	Lou Whitaker	.276, 244 HR, 1386 R, 1084 RBI
3B	George Kell	.325
3B	Travis Fryman	.274
SS	Alan Trammell	.285, 185 HR, 1231 R, 1003 RBI, 236 SB
SS	Harvey Kuenn	.314
C	Bill Freehan	.262, 200 HR
C	Lance Parrish	.263, 212 HR
OF	Ty Cobb	.368, 3900 Hits, 665 D, 284 T, 869 SB, 2088 R, 1805 RBI, .434 OBP
OF	Al Kaline	.297, 399 HR, 3007 H, 1622 R, 1583 RBI
OF	Sam Crawford	.309, 249 T, 1115 R, 1264 RBI, 318 SB
OF	Harry Heilmann	.342, 1209 R, 1442 RBI, .410 OBP
OF	Bobby Veach	.311, 1042 RBI
OF	Willie Horton	.276, 262 HR
SP	Hal Newhouser	3.07, 200-148
SP	Mickey Lolich	3.45, 207-175, 2670 SO
SP	Jack Morris	3.73, 198-150
SP	George Mullin	2.76, 209-179
SP	Dizzy Trout	3.20, 161-153
SP	Tommy Bridges	3.57, 194-138
SP	Hooks Dauss	3.30, 223-182

SP	Denny McLain	3.13, 117-62
RP	John Hiller	2.83, 125 SV
RP	Willie Hernandez	2.98, 120 SV

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